

Shared Leadership

SHARED LEADERSHIP IN ACTION IS PUBLISHED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE STUART FOUNDATION WINTER 2002

In Action

"The voices of parents are being heard alongside professionals to shape policy and practice to make a difference in the lives of children and families throughout California because of the vitally important collaborations between six forward-thinking California Child Welfare Services Departments, Parents Anonymous® Inc. and the Stuart Foundation."

Dr. Lisa Pion-Berlin,
President and Chief Executive Officer of
Parents Anonymous® Inc.



"Our foundation believes that we can best protect children and support families through collaborative partnerships. This innovative project addresses the most fundamental and important collaboration - the partnership between parents and service providers to address the needs of children and families in the Child Welfare System. In such a short time, we have already seen significant results in Fresno and Ventura counties through this stellar Parent Leadership Initiative spearheaded by Parents Anonymous® Inc."



Bill Bettencourt, Program Officer, Stuart Foundation

Child Welfare System Kicks Off Major Parent Leadership Initiative

The Stuart Foundation, a renowned philanthropic organization, selected Parents Anonymous® Inc. to launch a groundbreaking project to strengthen the California Child Welfare System by promoting and implementing the principles of Parent Leadership as a critical element in successful system change. Through this innovative alliance that began in January 2002, Parents Anonymous® Inc. is providing customized Parent Leadership Training and Technical Assistance to Child Welfare System staff and parents within six key California counties. Parents Anonymous® Inc. has designed a unique Parent Leadership training program that is assisting Child Welfare System staff in building effective partnerships with parents in activities such as local planning processes, funding decisions, and evaluation to ensure quality programs for children and families.

During the first year of this exciting new initiative, Parents Anonymous® Inc. began working intensively with the Child Welfare System administrators,



Linda Henderson and Richard Shaw, Ventura County Human Services Agency Administrators talk with Cleopra Dyas (center), California Parent Leadership Team Member.

managers, staff and parents in Fresno and Ventura Counties. Over the next two years, Imperial, Kern, Sacramento, and Tehama Counties will join the project. All of these Child Welfare Departments have wholeheartedly volunteered to participate in this initiative to build stronger and more effective partnerships between agency staff and parents in order to protect children, strengthen services in their communities and create

major Child Welfare System reform.

This innovative Parent Leadership initiative is off to a great start. In collaboration with Child Welfare System staff, Parents Anonymous® Inc. is building a base of new information on successful Parent Leadership strategies, challenges, and benefits, creating a statewide model for system reform through Parent Leadership, and making an important contribution to the overall goal of strengthening the California Child Protection System. When Parent Leadership is successfully implemented, significant

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Child Welfare System Kicks Off

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results are achieved, which mutually benefit families, communities and service delivery systems.

This annual newsletter will provide an update on the developments of this state-of-the-art Parent Leadership project. In this issue the success of the project within the Fresno County and Ventura County Child Welfare Systems are showcased. Readers will learn about the:

- Process of establishing a Parent Leadership Task Force that involves parents, administrators and social workers;
- Strategies that support parents as effective change agents within the Child Protection System;
- Creative ways that Child Protection staff are effectively partnering with parents.



Catherine Huerta, Assistant Director, Children and Family Services Department, Fresno County welcomes participants at the Parent Leadership Forum.

What is Shared Leadership within Child Welfare?

Throughout the country, the voices of parents are being heard along-side professionals to shape policy and practice to make a difference in the lives of children and families. State and local policy-makers, agency administrators and service providers are realizing that effective systems and services are best developed when parents are included in the planning, implementation, oversight and evaluation of services for families. Within the Child Welfare System, the parent expertise most needed is that of parents who have been or are at risk of abuse and neglect and have participated in intervention or prevention services. "Shared Leadership" is successfully achieved when professionals and parents commit to working collaboratively with each other whenever decisions are being made that will affect families.

Benefits Of Shared Leadership

The opportunities for Shared Leadership are increasing in Fresno and Ventura Counties due to their participation in this project. Child Welfare administrators, staff and parents identified the following benefits:

- Change from a "doing for" to a "doing with" and therefore, increased respect and investment by parents and providers
- Agencies, service providers and families understand one another better
- Increased trust and improved outcomes
- Decreased duplication of services and increased quality
- Shared vision and more ways of meeting goals
- Shared workloads
- Sense of excitement from the partnership
- Improved staff moral
- Increased effectiveness of services
- Families get their needs met through more meaningful services
- Increased funding opportunities
- Parents model leadership to their children
- Child Welfare System gains greater visibility and a more positive image in the community
- Cost effective
- Less staff burnout
- Builds stronger families and stronger communities

NEWS FLASH!

Parents Anonymous® Inc. and the Fresno County Children and Family Services Department have been selected to present a workshop at the 14th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect being held in Spring 2003. The workshop, entitled, "Strengthening Child Protection Systems through Parent Leadership" will highlight the significant progress in Ventura and Fresno Counties to build successful models of Shared Leadership. The federal Office of Child Abuse and Neglect (OCAN) sponsors this state-of-the-art conference for thousands of providers in the child abuse prevention field. For more information on this stimulating conference go to:

<http://www.calib.com/nccanch/cbconference/14natl.cfm>

Fresno and Ventura Counties Lead The Way

During the first year of this innovative initiative, Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff worked intensively with the Fresno County Human Service System, Children and Family Services Department and also the Human Services Agency of Ventura County, Department of Children and Family Services. While each county has taken a different approach based on their individualized needs, both have seen a significant increase in parents serving in leadership roles due to the implementation of this groundbreaking Parent Leadership project.

The Parent Leadership project began with a kick-off event in each county. Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff provided training to Child Welfare administrators, supervisors and social workers, and parents who are currently or have previously utilized services through the Child Protective Service System. The goals of this event were to:

- Promote the benefits of meaningful parent leadership;
- Identify a core group of agency representatives and parents interested in serving on a “Parent Leadership Task Force” responsible for developing and implementing parent leadership strategies in the County Child Welfare System.



Fresno County Parent Leaders learn about Shared Leadership.



Fresno County Parent Leadership Task Force members share ideas.

Fresno County

There was an outstanding response from Fresno County staff and parents interested in serving on the Parent Leadership Task Force. Ten parents, five supervisors and administrators, and seven social workers attended the first Task Force meeting. Through facilitated discussion, Parents Anonymous® Inc. helped Task Force members identify six-month goals to increase parent leadership and a

corresponding plan of action to reach those goals.

The Task Force decided to meet monthly, in the early evenings so parents would not have to miss work and staff would not have to stay too late in the evening. The Department would provide childcare. A social work supervisor and parent were selected to co-chair the Task Force and committees were immediately established to address Task Force goals.

Parents Anonymous® Inc. provided customized training and technical assistance on an ongoing basis as the Task Force identified specific needs. Trainings were co-facilitated by Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff and a Parents Anonymous® Parent Leader who had significant experience partnering with providers in decision-making capacities. All trainings were open to Task Force members, along with additional Department staff and parents who had expressed interest in assuming leadership roles within the Child Protection System. Some examples of trainings are highlighted below.

“Telling Your Story” – This training was designed to help parents:

- Think about who their target audience is when sharing their story;
- Understand what message they want to convey with their story;
- Practice telling their story in an effective, nonjudgmental and non-threatening manner.

For example, a parent may want to give a different message, by highlighting different parts of their story,

when talking with a group of new parents in the Child Protection System as compared to making a presentation to the Board of Supervisors.

“Identifying Your Concerns and Communicating Effectively” – This training focused on strengthening partnerships between parents and agency staff by providing techniques to accurately identify concerns, formulate questions, and communicate needs and ideas better.



Parent Leadership Task Force members develop a Parent Leadership Plan.

The dynamic partnership that developed with administrators and staff within the Fresno County Children and Family Services Department, Parent Leaders on the Task Force, and Parents Anonymous® Inc. has led to landmark results in the Fresno County Child Protection System including:

- Two parents serve as co-trainers with staff in parent education classes offered through the Department.
- Two Parent Leaders are participating in the Multidisciplinary Round Table process as advocates at both the Emergency Response and Child Protective levels.
- Parent Leaders are co-training with staff during Family Reunification Orientations by presenting their story, talking about the importance of developing case plans that meet family needs, and answering parents’ questions.
- A Parent Leader has been identified to serve on the Child Protective Services Oversight Committee.
- Three parents have been identified to participate in new staff orientation. They will share their stories and provide insight to new Child Protective Service workers about what was

helpful and what might have been helpful when they were first involved with the system.

- A subcommittee of the Task Force was formed to create a newsletter, written by parents and social workers, to provide information to families about the Department and the multiple resources available to families.
- A subcommittee of the Task Force is investigating having Parent Leaders serve in paid positions as case aides working hand-in-hand with social workers and families.

Great work Fresno County!

Ventura County

The Ventura County Department of Children and Family Services decided that their first Parent Leadership training would be targeted to middle management staff to ensure that the Department demonstrated a unified message and commitment to the Shared Leadership model. Through a training entitled, **“Strengthening the Child Welfare System through Parent Leadership,”** Parents Anonymous® Inc. created an opportunity for social work supervisors and managers to discuss the benefits and possible challenges they may face as the Department moved towards a Shared Leadership model. Lots of suggestions and recommendations were made to identify parents who may be interested in serving on the Task Force.

With middle management on board, it was a breeze to identify volunteers to participate on the Parent

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Managers commit to Shared Leadership in Ventura County.

Leadership Task Force. Seven managers and social workers and six parents attended the first Task Force meeting. Like Fresno County, the Task Force members agreed to meet monthly, in the early evening, with childcare provided by the Department. Parents Anonymous® Inc. helped the Task Force by stimulating discussion and identifying direction for Parent Leadership goals for their county. Some of their immediate goals included:

- Parents from the Task Force serving in an advisory capacity to management regarding policy and practice within the Department.
- Parents serving on strategic Department advisory committees.
- Parents participating in social work staff training by sharing their stories and providing insight as to what was helpful and what might have been more effective when they were in the Child Protection System.
- Parents being included in the development and review of grants that are given to community-based agencies that provide family services.
- Parents serving as co-trainers to help educate other parents, school personnel and community-based agency staff about the role and services of the Department.
- Parents trained to serve as mentors to families as they go through the court system.

During the upcoming months Parents Anonymous® Inc. will continue to provide customized training and technical assistance to support the momentous work of the Task Force and advance the Shared Leadership agenda within the Ventura County Child Welfare System.

The Ventura County Parent Leadership Task Force is off and running at full speed. Following two meetings, the protective walls are breaking down and staff and parents are really working as one to make things better for children and parents. When one social worker described the procedures involved when children are removed from a family, a Parent Leader on the Task Force, who had previously had her children removed, responded by saying, "No parent wants her children taken, it's the hardest thing in the world. But I don't envy you. You have a really hard job. Even though I don't like it, my involvement with CPS saved my life and I thank you for that." As

SHARED LEADERSHIP AT THE STATE LEVEL

The impact of this innovative project to strengthen the Child Welfare System through Parent Leadership has resulted in significant opportunities for Parent Leadership outside of their county:

- Two Parent Leaders from Fresno County have been invited to serve on the Workforce Preparation subcommittee of the Child Welfare System Stakeholders Group.
- One Parent Leader from Ventura County has been selected to serve on the California Parent Leadership Team. The Team works with Parents Anonymous® Inc. to provide training on Parent Leadership throughout California and participates in policy and planning activities with the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention.

parents and staff understand one another's perspectives better, they can work together to better meet the needs of children and families.

With training, technical assistance and support provided through Parents Anonymous® Inc., Child Welfare System staff and parents are:

- Developing new attitudes, behaviors and trust leading to stronger partnerships
- Creating an agency culture with resources to support meaningful Parent Leadership
- Addressing barriers to partnering with parents
- Identifying decision-making roles for parents
- Supporting and recognizing parents in leadership roles and encouraging them to serve as role models and mentors to other parents.

For more information about Parent Leadership, contact:

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SUGGESTED READINGS...

Research on Parent Leadership: Significance and Findings

Parents Anonymous® Inc.

Parents Anonymous® Inc. took the research on leadership to a new level when we asked how leadership skills are developed in Parent Leaders. This important Research Profile highlights the findings of Parents Anonymous® Inc. Parent Leadership research studies to date. The goals of the Parents Anonymous® Parent Leadership research agenda include:

- Defining the essential nature of Parent Leadership;
- Obtaining a clearer understanding of the development of Parent Leadership and the supports needed for its enhancement;
- Identifying the significant behaviors and activities of Parent Leaders.

The first Parent Leadership research study in this bulletin

is an exploratory review of interviews and meetings with the members of the first Parents Anonymous® National Parent Leadership Teamsm. This study identified the “Pathways to Parent Leadership – Ten Steps to Success,” which describes the process of leadership development in parents. The additional studies described are the results of follow-up surveys with Parent Leaders who attended Parents Anonymous® National Parent Leadership Trainings. These studies identify leadership activities and behaviors engaged in by Parent Leaders, and assess their development and attitudes about themselves as leaders.

These research studies are the first of their kind and provide readers with a base of knowledge on Parent Leadership. You can request a copy of this Research Profile, entitled *Research on Parent Leadership: Significance and Findings* from Parents Anonymous® Inc. by contacting Meryl Levine at mlevine@parentsanonymous.org or fax to (909) 625-6304.

Preliminary Results are Positive!

A comprehensive evaluation component of this project is underway. Preliminary data from Ventura and Fresno Counties show:

- Agency staff have developed a new appreciation of parents and the importance of partnering with parents at all levels of the Child Welfare System.
- Parents have indicated a new understanding of their potential for working with agency personnel to increase their voice in policy and practice.

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